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## THE GERMAN UNIVERSITIES.\*

I SHOULD like today to give you an idea of German universities as compared with our own;—and the subject seems to me a rather appropriate one, for various reasons:

A great many of us are more or less directly affiliated with Germany; either we ourselves, or our parents or grandparents, or some near and dear relative or friend came from there. Indeed, if England is our mother country, then Germany may, in the same sense, be called our Fatherland, and through the personal influence of our German-American fellow-citizens as well as through our literary and general cultural relations with the old country it has come about that we owe to Germany much of the best in our lives.

That is quite particularly true in regard to our universities. Even our oldest institutions, patterned as they were after English colleges, nevertheless owe their recent scientific renaissance distinctly to German influence. There is nothing new in this statement, the fact is recognized everywhere by those who know.

It may be of interest, then, for us, to see, what these German universities are, how they are working in their own country, what we may yet learn from them, and whether we have not, in some respects, outgrown their leadership, and are ready to pay back in some measure, what we owe to them.

Moreover, some of you, or your friends, here or elsewhere, will probably, sooner or later, want to go to a German university yourselves, and it may be well for you to know what to look for; to judge by yourselves, whether and when and where to go. I have seen many a man go to Europe, when it would have been better for him to continue his studies at some American university.

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\*An address delivered at Bloomington, Indiana, date uncertain.

In comparing, then, the German universities with our own, we find at the outset that we have on the one hand, in Germany, a certain well-defined unit,—so that we really may speak of the German university rather than universities, while on the other hand, in our country, we have a large variety of institutions, all being called, or calling themselves, universities.

The German universities are all maintained and controlled directly by the Government; they are all state institutions and they all maintain the same standard and principles. To be sure, in reality, they cannot all be entirely alike; no two men and no two places are alike, and there are differences in size and in efficiency between the various universities—Berlin for instance has about 8,000 students, while some of the smaller universities have only a few hundred—; but these differences are not officially recognized. In rank and rights and duties, in purpose and methods, in the preparation and general character of students, no one university could or would claim to be different from the rest.

The purpose of the German university, as a state institution, is to train young men, and more recently also young women, for public service in the so-called learned professions, to supply the state with judges, administrative officials, preachers, physicians, with higher teachers, chemists, apothecaries, and the like.

The practice of all these and similar professions is in Germany regulated by law; nobody can be a preacher, a physician, or a druggist, any more than a teacher, without having passed certain prescribed state examinations, and to these examinations he is admitted only after having spent a certain number of years at the university;—for the druggist the required time is two years, for most of the other professions the minimum is three years, for the physician it is five years. You see, then, what an all important factor in the national life of Germany the university must be.

However, the university serves the public welfare not only in this strictly official capacity, as the commissioned nursery of state officials; but public opinion and long-established tradition also

demand that the university shall work for the progress of the country and of humanity by *extending* the realms of human knowledge, by what we call original research work.

Work of this kind, of course, must be done by someone, if humanity is to progress in any direction; work of this kind can be done successfully only under favorable conditions, by well-trained men, supplied with the necessary laboratories and libraries; and even then, work of this kind is necessarily slow, so far as results are concerned. After generations and generations of scholars have been devoting their lives to studying and thinking, and experimenting and calculating, it is not to be expected that we should keep on hitting upon new epoch-making results every day or every year or decade. The mines of truth are far from being exhausted; but the veins that contain the precious ore have been followed up to such an extent and to such a depth that the very passages leading to the unexplored regions form in themselves a complete labyrinth which it takes years and years to make oneself familiar with.

Yet the man who does not know and has no means of finding out what has been explored, is constantly in danger of undertaking work which has already been done by someone else. Such work is, of course, quite useful to the man who does it; it is *to him* original work and the educational value of such practice work is now well recognized; in college, school, and kindergarten we like to have our young people find things out by themselves, we want them to develop their own ears and eyes and minds. But for the ultimate progress of *science* we do not want duplication of work; there we want progressive continuity.

Now in this necessarily slow process it is but natural that many scholars must content themselves with the modest task of handling material which may seem or be insignificant in itself, of removing the rubbish that lies in the way of further progress, until the vein grows richer again, and in the fulness of time the master stroke of some ingenious or fortunate man opens up new wealth, new probabilities of blessing for mankind.

So it is in all departments of learning as in *all* professions; it is not the fitful effort of the individual, but the steady combined work of many men of the guild of scholars, which insures progress.

And even the tangible results of men of genius have not always an immediate market value which would make the workers financially independent.

Of the educational value of all research work we have already spoken; it is certain that the very teaching at a university is invigorated and vitalized by nothing so much as by the teacher's own earnest self-devotion to strenuous work. The very presence among us of such scientific workers is a source of inspiration to all the rest of us, and of much more value than all the neat clockwork regularity and the devices and red-tape of the humdrum pedagogue, or the supercilious brilliancy of the Chautauqua men and the extension wind-bag.

These facts are well understood in Germany; and they are coming to be more and more clearly understood in our country too. But we must admit that we are still far behind Germany in this respect. Productive scholarship is not yet sufficiently safeguarded and encouraged; consequently there is yet comparatively little of it. This is not the fault of our young scholars, and much less can it be said that our students are not yet ready for it. It is the fault of those who are shaping the destinies of our larger universities. Our governments are still much too parsimonious in matters of education. And when some multimillionaire gives millions to or for some institution, we see, with rarest exceptions, the old story repeating itself: a big undergraduate teaching establishment is founded, work is undertaken which is done and can be had just as well at a dozen good institutions in the immediate neighborhood, and by the time that is done the money is gone and practically nothing is left to build up the greatest work. However, it must also be said that during the last fifteen years enormous progress has been made in the right direction, and it is my opinion that in the near future our now developing American universities will surpass in usefulness

their German sister institutions, because they will be in some respects more rationally organized than their sister universities of the old world.

The German universities, in scientific respects so far ahead of us, may be called primarily associations of independent scholars at work, and of students who learn to work mainly by watching the older men work.

This, to be sure, would be a one-sided description; for the teaching, too, is fairly well organized. It is done by lectures and seminary work in the humanities, by lecture and laboratory work in the sciences; but the teaching is eminently the direct expression of the teacher's own work. Some fundamental introductory courses are given year after year; but the bulk and essence of the lecture work is dependent, from year to year, upon the field in which the teachers themselves are actively interested. And an equally extensive individual liberty is enjoyed by the student in the choice of his own work.

The teacher enjoys freedom in teaching—*Lehrfreiheit*—and the student enjoys freedom in learning—*Lernfreiheit*—these are the watchwords, and as there are a great many teachers at work and moreover the student can and does freely go from one place to the other, he can usually find the work he wants to do.

And this may lead us to another phase of our subject, to the life of the German student, in his relations to his teachers, to the state and to his fellow-students.

In order to be admitted to a university the German student must be a graduate of some one of the higher schools, the *Gymnasium* which emphasizes especially the humanities, or the *Realschule* which lays more stress on the sciences. These schools are not only preparatory schools for the university; they also prepare for the higher career in such professions as forestry, postal and railroad service, and other walks of life; but they, and they alone, also prepare for the university. Foreigners are admitted upon testimonials from similar institutes such as our colleges; on the whole, foreigners are readily admitted; not many embarrassing questions are asked, and some of our American universi-

ties have complained of late of too lax proceedings in this respect, and I read the other day that at Berlin testimonials from Russia will no longer be recognized at par.

The German preparatory schools of which I spoke, offer courses of eleven years, including the elementary courses. The German student, then, in entering the university has passed through eleven years of severe schooling. He has so far had little free choice of courses; and he has been under strict discipline and supervision. In *educational* matters, namely, it is believed in Germany, that a person must first be educated by others to some extent, that he must learn a certain amount about things, before he can decide for himself, what is really good for him. I am afraid we are growing a little too far away from this principle, when we extend free choice of courses into our high-schools and even into primary schools as advocated by the *Chicago School Review* some time ago. The German student after having passed through this compulsory educational training, now enters the free arena of individual work, and suddenly, I think too suddenly, everything, his whole evolution of life changes radically. With all his scholastic preparation he is still very young in years—perhaps eighteen years old, and he is much younger still in experience.

Like our high-schools and colleges, the German Gymnasien and Realschulen are scattered broadcast throughout the country, so that usually the student did not have to leave home in order to attend them; but of universities there are only one or two more than a dozen in the whole Empire; so the young student has now for the first time to leave his home; so far, he has been a pupil, now he is going to be considered a man among men, a member of a university, free from any control or supervision.

At the university *place*, there are no dormitories. He has, for the first time, to find his own room and make his own home; there are practically no boarding-houses; he has to take his meals in restaurants, now here now there, wherever he happens to drop in, until he gets acquainted and finds the best place to go to. And everywhere, in public restaurants, we would call

them saloons, he is expected to take beer or wine with his meals; so the young body is easily exposed to the dangers of alcoholism.

And then, he has to make new friends, to meet and fall in with strangers, preferably with fellow-students. No wonder then, if in this entirely new world, with so many new impressions crowding in from all sides, he is apt to forget for awhile, that he came to the university in order to *study*.

Now many of you may think: this is precisely what we had to go through. You are describing our own experience. Well, I know I am, and every teacher knows it and will make due allowance for it. But then, we have a president, and we have deans, and head-professors, whose business it is to look after the interests of their students, and *every* teacher is at any time ready to help any student to the best of his ability. The German student has no one to turn to for advice, while the change from discipline to freedom is more abrupt, and the temptations in his way are stronger. Here, as I see it, is the weakest spot in the German higher educational system. At the university he may shirk or entirely drop his work and still remain seemingly in good standing. Even residence at the university after personal immatriculation is expected rather than required or enforced. With the lecture system the professor does not know his hearers personally and never needs to meet or get acquainted with them. The student may go to the lecture or he may not, as he may or not go to the theatre or church; nobody cares.

There are no examinations held; no credits to be expected at the end of the term. He may go to one or to several universities and stay as long as he can pay his expenses. During his whole university time he is never called upon by anyone, to give an account of his work, or life, or progress. You see that the young man would have to be unusually provident and far-sighted, to realize at the outset that the day of reckoning must come, that in the end he will have to pass a searching state-examination, and that altogether this is the time for him to make or mar his life.



With our American system it may be said that it takes a naturally cheap boy to go to pieces, a boy without good home training, without sound blood and brains and without ambition; as Dr. Jordan used to say, you cannot fasten a thousand dollar education unto a ten-cent boy. But the average boy is quite safe and reasonably sure to find the right way.

In Germany, the University student's first year is the critical period of his life; then it takes a superior boy to stick to his right way; the average boy is in danger and the inferior boy in great danger of going astray during the very first year or months of his academic life; in that crucial test of his character when for the first time and suddenly he is free from the constraint of school and home life and has not yet undergone the uplifting influence of the true university life and work. These beneficial influences are all there; they are not forced upon him; but they are ready to take hold of him, and if only he has strength, or good luck, or both, enough to take care of himself for a little while, *then* he too is reasonably safe. The more promptly and completely he falls in with his fellow students, the sooner he identifies himself with the university, the better for him.

It is a matter of general observation that wherever legislation is wanting, public opinion and social customs rule in the place of law. So it is in German universities, as it is largely also with us. Free from any authoritative restrictions, the German students manage to take care of themselves and to maintain a high standard of life.

That is without a doubt due principally to the fact that the professors themselves are earnest workers who have given themselves up body and soul to the search after truth. They are not triflers; they mean business. Some of them may in their complete self-surrender to their line of work, develop some personal oddities; some may overrate their own line of work, or lack the proper sense of proportion and lose themselves in details; but the fact remains that they are serious men who mean business, and so they soon have the respect, the veneration of the student. The young student may not at first be attracted by them. The

subject seems remote and these men do not teach to please or even interest him. Some of them—I am speaking of extreme cases—have a way of talking as it were to themselves; they do not seem to see their hearers or to care for them, they explain their subjects to their own satisfaction, but they all mean business, and the student soon notices that there is some actual work going on and some intense human interest engaged; this appeals to him and after awhile he begins to look at his professor's troubles and tasks and his own problems, and they gradually fill his soul with that peculiar restless curiosity and uneasiness which is nowhere quite satisfied or at peace with itself, except when at work on the subject of its choice, and which is the making both of the ethical man and of the young scholar.

This interest follows him from the lecture room not only into his study, but into his daily intercourse with his fellow students, into his pleasures, into his very follies.

Soon then, at the smaller Universities, the faithful and attentive hearer will in one way or another, become personally acquainted with his teacher. The latter usually gathers about him a group of enthusiastic students and spends his leisure hours freely with them. Germans are fond of walking. The students will take long afternoon walks into the surrounding country, and often you can see some young or elderly professor walking out of the city, surrounded by a number of younger men, his students, his fellow students. His younger companions want no recommendations from him; they do not expect to be examined by him. He may not even belong to the examining board, or if he does, they may be at some other University by the time they will be ready for their examinations; so this professor probably will never have any official influence over their lives. It is their interest in his work, and his interest in their studies and work which draws these men together.

At Heidelberg, some of our professors, Professor Neumann especially, would have their lectures in the afternoon which was our favorite walking time. So often, on beautiful days, we would go to his house and as we grew better acquainted, we would not

even always go up to his room, but from the street we would call up to his window: "We come to tell you that there is not going to be any lecture this afternoon, because we want to go out walking and we should like to have you with us." Sometimes, then, he would answer: "No, I can't go with you today; I have only just time to give my lecture, and then I must go home to work again." Then, of course, we would drop our trip and go to hear his lecture. But often he would drop his lecture and come and spend the afternoon or perhaps the evening with us. There were James Morgan Hart, now of Cornell University, and Bright, now professor at Johns Hopkins University, and a dozen others, and we had a thoroughly good time together. Problems that had come up in our work or in the lectures would be discussed, the latest books and articles and numbers of periodicals had been read and noticed by the one or the other; new things were pouring in from all sides; people were as eager to report them as some are to report the latest jokes—which by the way were likewise told and enjoyed—it was difficult for anyone to avoid hearing all about what was going on in his field of work, with all that the frankest criticisms of everyone and everything; the unreserved intellectual honesty, the true teacher's spirit.

This whole atmosphere of genuine work appeals to the German student perhaps more than it would to his brother student elsewhere in Europe. He is intellectually prepared for further work and he comes almost entirely from the good stock of the modest middle classes in Germany. His parents are working in order that he may go to the University, and he himself must get ready to work for his living. The sons of the nobility prefer service in the army; the men of wealth usually send their children to a commercial school. Few go to the University for self-culture alone. This is regrettable, and German writers have often pointed with bitterness at England, where the sons of the highest nobility of birth and wealth go to the Universities, not to prepare for any professions, but just to develop into gentlemen of culture. Now I agree, that it may be well enough for a University to be graced by a certain number of these young

gentlemen, and especially it is a good thing for the latter to be at a University for awhile. But, as may be seen from Oxford, and also from some of our American Universities, the danger lies in that an undue proportion of very wealthy students, sent by their parents just to "graduate," may tend to substitute for the truly strenuous life, for the virility of hard work, the pseudo-strenuous life of sport and social dissipation, until the real student, he for whom the University was established, who comes to it for honest work, is snubbed and considered a disloyal or second class student, if he cannot or will not support a football team.

This is a danger which American colleges will have to face and suppress in the near future. I trust that this perverted college spirit will never prevail at our University.

And now, how do the German students live and enjoy themselves among each other *socially*? From what we have seen, it will be clear that there can be no college spirit and no class spirit in any sense of these words.

Few students spend all their time at one University, most attend two or more, attracted by various motives, beautiful scenery, persuasion of friends and later by the work offered. The student, therefore, does not form any particular attachment to any one University; he never thinks of the institution as such as a particular entity; they are all the same to him. They are all state institutions, they are all taken care of and flourishing, they are something quite impersonal to him. He may like one *place* better than another, but when he sings of Old Heidelberg it is not the University at Heidelberg he has in mind, but the quaint old city, and the glorious surroundings of Heidelberg. He thinks of the happy hours he has spent there with his fellow-students and his teachers; but certainly never of the institution as such. Nor is there any class spirit, because there are no classes. Each one studies where, what, and as long as he needs to study, and then goes to his province or where he may prefer to pass his state examinations.

Instead, however, there exists something similar to our college and class spirit, quite similar at least, in its effect upon the student. The college spirit there expands into a more general academic spirit. All students in the whole country form, as it were, a large guild of their own. It makes no difference where he is, the fact, that he is a student, a university man, fills him with enthusiasm and pride. This spirit often develops, in the *young* student especially, into a feeling of caste superiority which would be ridiculous entirely and only, if it did not also fill him with a keen sense of honor and responsibility. That is, of course, everywhere the redeeming feature of caste spirit, that it is apt to stiffen the moral backbone of the individual member of a class, or society or club or profession. So it is in our case: to the young student humanity consists of two kinds of people, student and non-students. The latter he calls Philistines and he looks at them with ill-concealed pity. This is, of course, right ridiculous; but it is useful too. That halo of poetry and glory and honor and idealism with which he surrounds his student life long before he enters upon it, is the main safe-guard of the young student during that first critical period we spoke of.

This pride in his profession also predisposes him to willingly submit to the severe training he is going to receive at the hands of his older fellow-students. Namely our class spirit narrows and individualizes itself there to the complete subordination of every younger student to any older student. Wherever two students meet in academic circles, they will at once find out how many semesters each one has spent at the University, and the one older in semesters immediately assumes a sort of spokesman- and leadership. Even in later years this is in a way observed, though more humorously, as a matter of academic reminiscence. With the young student it is strictly enforced. Not by hazing or any such brutal means, but by tradition and social compulsion.

The young student is like a novice at first; he is first to be educated before he is received into the academic brotherhood as a full-fledged member, and he willingly accepts the training. After he has become acquainted with a number of older students

he will usually select one of them as his special patron and advisor. If he is accepted—and of course the sympathies are usually mutual—then there usually develops a really beautiful relation between the two, as between two brothers, and beneficial not only to the younger man whom it helps to keep straight, but also to the guiding comrade himself. For it is a beautiful feature in the character of humanity that no half-way decent man will wilfully mislead or soil and spoil the life or soul of a young trusting friend. Only the lowest of the low will do that. As a rule, a man is instinctively at his best, on his good behavior, in the sacred presence of youth.

The code of conduct which I have described is absent especially in the closer academic communities of the small Universities, and it is at its height at the various student societies, where almost military subordination and discipline is maintained. Some of these societies are of more social character, some are very exclusive; they intend to develop good social manners and also steadiness of character and self-reliance in their members. They do not interest us here. Other societies devote themselves to departmental work, like our own departmental clubs. One of these a foreigner should join by all means. Finally the students also form larger associations for mutual aid in case of sickness, for a small annual fee, a quarter or two, one is entitled in case of sickness to the fine service of the University physicians, of a nurse and if necessary to admittance and free full treatment in the University hospital. I have long wished to see a similar association organized here by our students also.

In conclusion I must not fail to speak again of one great drawback in German student life, namely the dangers and deteriorating effects of alcoholism. For this, of course, the Universities are not responsible; the people everywhere in Europe as in our own big cities freely use alcoholic drinks and many are the victims of this habit. Of late a temperance movement has arisen in Germany, advocated not so much by the clergy, as in our country, as by the physicians, and it is to be hoped that the results will soon make themselves felt. Of late also attempts

have been made to introduce athletic games into the German students' life, and whatever might be said about and against the excrescences of our athletic sports, certainly the German student would be vastly benefited, if instead of measuring his strength in beer-duels, he would take up track athletics, lawn tennis, baseball and, if necessary, even football.